

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN URGES A YOUNG FRIEND TO TAKE AN OLD MISTRESS

*"...the sin in less...
and in the Dark all Cats are grey..."*

June 25, 1745, MY DEAR FRIEND

I know of no Medicine fit to diminish the violent natural inclination you mention; and if I did, I think I should not communicate it to you. Marriage is the proper Remedy. It is the most natural State of Man, and therefore the State in which you will find solid Happiness. Your Reason against entering into it at present appears to be not well founded. The Circumstantial Advantages you have in view by postponing it are not only uncertain, but they are small in comparison with the Thing itself, *the being married and settled*. It is the Man and Woman united that make the complete being. Separate she wants his force of Body and Strength of Reason, he her Softness, Sensibility and acute Discernment. Together they are most likely to succeed in the World. A single Man has not nearly the Value he would have in that State of Union. He is an incomplete Animal. He resembles the odd Half of a Pair of Scissors.

If you get a prudent, healthy wife, your Industry in your Profession, with her good Economy, will be a Fortune sufficient.

But if you will not take this Counsel, and persist in thinking that Commerce with the Sex is inevitable, then I repeat my former Advice that in your Amours you should *prefer old Women to young ones*. This you call a Paradox, and demand my reasons. They are these:

1. Because they have more Knowledge of the world, and their Minds are better stored with Observations; their conversation is more improving, and more lastingly agreeable.
2. Because when Women cease to be handsome, they study to be good. To maintain their Influence over Man, they supply the Diminution of Beauty by an Augmentation of Utility. They learn to do a thousand Services, small and great, and are the most tender and useful of Friends when you are sick. Thus, they continue amiable. Hence, there is hardly such a thing to be found as an Old Woman who is not a good Woman.
3. Because there is no hazard of children, which irregularly produced may be attended with much inconvenience.
4. Because through more Experience they are more prudent and discreet in conducting an Intrigue to prevent Suspicion. The Commerce with them is therefore safer with regard

to your reputation; and regard to theirs, if the Affair should happen to be known, considerate People might be inclined to excuse an old Woman, who would kindly take care of a young Man, form his manners by her good Councils, and prevent his ruining his Health and Fortune among mercenary Prostitutes.

5. Because in every Animal that walks upright, the Deficiency of the Fluids that fill the Muscles appears first in the highest Part. The Face first grows lank and Wrinkled; then the Neck; then the Breast and Arms; the lower parts continuing to the last as plump as ever; so that covering all above with a Basket, and regarding only what is below the Girdle, it is impossible of two Women to know an old one from a young one. In addition, as in the Dark, all Cats are grey; the Pleasure of Corporal Enjoyment with an old Woman is at least equal and frequently superior every Knack being by Practice capable by improvement.

6. Because the sin is less. The Debauching of a Virgin may be her Ruin, and make her Life unhappy.

7. Because the Compunction is less. The having made a young Girl *miserable* may give you frequent bitter Reflections; none of which can attend making an old Woman *happy*.

8. 8th & lastly. They are so grateful!!!

Thus much for my Paradox. But still I advise you to marry immediately; being sincerely

Your Affectionate Friend,
Benj. Franklin